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Our past is a fascinating, curious prolog to present, provides roots for future

The pace of modern times leaves our heads spinning -- and, too often, it makes us forget where we've been and just how much we owe to the folks who came before us. When it comes right down to it, York County and Poquoson aren't much younger than Jamestown.

As soon as our forefathers dug in well at that settlement, they branched out -- taming the land and building homes as they went. From those intrepid settlers, the seeds of modern York County and Poquoson were sown.

Today, we refer to enclaves such as Dare, Messick, Seaford, Tabb and Bruton, fully knowing that they are anachronistic names for places that don't really exist today. But in the not-to-distant past, these were active, thriving villages of their own where farming and water-related industries sustained life.

The speed of today's changes is a new thing -- our grandparents still made their own soap and grew their own food. Today's middle-aged baby-boomers remember when Route 17 was just a two-lane road -- and their parents remember when it was a dirt road which provided the only access to the city -- Newport News.

As late as the 1950s, ferries plied the York River and anyone wanting to visit far-away Gloucester had to make that crossing. There were one-room schoolhouses and black and white students were educated in separate facilities up until the mid-60s.

World War II changed the face of York County as it changed the face of the rest of the country. Not since the days following the Civil War had there been such an influx of "move-ins." First they came to support the war effort by working at places like Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company, as it was known then. When the war ended, many of them remained on the Peninsula, and in the 1950s, workers at then-NACA discovered "the country" and the population boom was on.

York and Poquoson have been growing ever since.

And while we celebrate the new, we honor the old . . . our ancestors who carved York County and Poquoson out of the Colonial wilderness, and their descendants who built stores and farms, schools and churches. They're the Wainwrights and the Rollins, the Insleys and the Wornoms, the Smiths and the Freemans, the Whites and the Greens. Their sons and daughters are our grandparents and our parents.

As we enter the 21st century, we pass along to our own children many of the values our ancestors passed on to us. They've provided the footprints . . . and it's now our job to fill their shoes and prepare for generations yet to come.

"Footprints" is a photographic album of our past, a group of images which conveys, far more than words, where we've come from. The following individuals lent us their family photographs for inclusion in "Footprints:" Joy Barefoot (Fraser, Phillips families); Naomi Diggs (White family); Frank Green (Wainwright, Green families); Beth Meisner (Gallagher family); Claytor-Rollins Funeral Home and family (Rollins, Forrest, Shaw and Hopkins families); and Peggy Nettles (Hartman photograph). We neglected to record the name of the gentleman who left the Little League photographs.

***

Our cover girl is Florence Geneva Hopkins of Poquoson, who just couldn't help but show off her fancy frock, c. 1932.

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